

The Relationship between Economic Consequences and Psychological Motivations of Addictive Consumption Behavior of Virtual Goods

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of rapid technological development in contemporary times, addictive consumption behavior of virtual goods has become increasingly prominent, drawing widespread attention from society to the psychological motivations of consumers and the economic consequences. This article, by reviewing relevant domestic and foreign literature, first analyzes the economic consequences of addictive consumption of virtual goods, including individual financial loss of control, consumption regret, as well as social consumption structure imbalance and platform responsibility disputes. Then, it explores the psychological motivations behind this behavior, clarifying its correlation with individual lack of self-regulation ability, activation of the dopamine reward mechanism, emotional regulation motives, and personality trait differences. At the individual level, addictive consumption leads to financial strain, psychological stress, and impaired self-regulation, often driven by mechanisms such as dopamine reward and emotional avoidance. Socially, it contributes to structural imbalances in consumption patterns, diverting resources excessively toward virtual goods and increasing public costs related to familial and legal disputes. This article highlights limitations in current research, and provides a foundation for interdisciplinary approaches, platform accountability, and policy intervention--ultimately aiming to promote sustainable consumption behavior.

Keywords: Addictive consumption; self-ability deficiency; dopamine reward mechanism; platform addiction mechanism; reinforcement of addictive social attributes

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of science and technology, virtual commodity consumption has gradually integrated into people's daily life, and live rewards, game recharge, blind box purchases and other consumption forms are constantly emerging. Some consumers show uncontrollable dependence characteristics in this kind of consumption. Even if they know that it may harm their long-term interests, they continue to consume at high frequency and in excess. This addictive consumption phenomenon has attracted widespread social attention.

In reality, addictive consumption not only brings debt accumulation, consumption regret and psychological pressure to individuals, but also may cause the destruction of the consumption structure and an increase in public costs at the social level. For example, the imbalance in resource allocation caused by the rising proportion of virtual commodity consumption, and the liability dispute caused by some platforms to strengthen the addiction mechanism through algorithm design.

Although the existing literature has been discussed from the perspectives of psychology, economics, etc. Psychology focuses on individual motives such as lack of self-regulation and dopamine reward mechanism, and economics focuses on the irrationality of consumption decision-making and the impact of market structure, but the two lack disciplinary integration and have not yet formed an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. At the same time, there are differences in research at home and abroad. Foreign research on behavioral addiction started early and achieved remarkable results in neuromechanism and intervention design. In China, it is mostly concentrated on specific consumption scenarios, and the universal interpretation of the addiction mechanism is insufficient. By combining relevant literature at home and abroad, this article first analyzes the economic consequences of addictive consumption of virtual commodities, then explores its psychological motives, clarifies the limitations of existing research, provides a theoretical basis for subsequent interdisciplinary research, platform responsibility design and policy intervention, and ultimately promotes the formation of sustainable consumption behavior.

2. Concept

2.1 The Concept and Underlying Logic of Consumer Addiction

Addictive consumption of virtual goods refers to individuals' live broadcast rewards, game props, and virtual social

gifts, driven by irrational motivation. Virtual goods such as digital collections continue to carry out high-frequency and excessive consumption, and gradually lose control. Its core feature is that even if it knows that it may harm its long-term interests, such as financial crisis and life imbalance, it is still difficult to stop consumption, and consumption decision-making is significantly irrational.

From the perspective of economics, consumption behavior is determined by factors such as preference, price and income. The demand curve reflects the law of diminishing marginal utility, while in reality, addictive consumption may show abnormal demand elasticity. From a psychological perspective, addictive consumption has a complex psychological mechanism. At the cognitive level, there is a situation of satisfaction of preferences and loss. The emotional level is related to emotional needs such as stress relief, and the social level is affected by group identity and other factors. These psychological factors combine to promote and maintain addictive consumption. Addictive consumption is an individual's continuous consumption behavior to meet a certain psychological need or relieve negative emotions, even if they know that the behavior will hurt their finances or life. Behavioral economics focuses on the irrational and dependent characteristics of such consumption behavior.

2.2 Types of Consumption Addiction

At present, the typical addictive consumption in the research includes three categories: First, virtual consumption, such as live broadcast rewards, short video gifts, and game recharge. Such consumption is usually induced by platform reward mechanisms, social interaction and rewards, with the characteristics of high frequency and simple operation. The study found through the Logistic model that consumer characteristics and game characteristics will significantly affect addiction preferences. Men are more inclined to personal addiction, women are more inclined to social addiction, and the proportion of personal addiction preferences is higher [1]. The second is material consumption, such as shopping addiction, blind box purchase, and luxury hoarding, such behaviors for the purpose of obtaining a sense of material ownership and social identity, showing impulsiveness and repetitiveness. The third is platform-induced consumption, such as continuous purchases brought by algorithm recommendations, unplanned improvised consumption driven by preferential activities, data-driven advertising stimulation, etc. Such consumption is mostly the result of platform technology and big data deduction and design, which strengthens individuals' dependence on a certain path of addictive behaviors.

3. Consequences of Addictive Consumption

3.1 Consequences at the Individual Level

In the consumption of virtual goods, the platform activates the brain's dopamine reward system through design feedback, so that consumers have a cycle of thirst-satisfaction in high-frequency interaction. This neural mechanism will strengthen the dependence on virtual goods, while combining cognitive bias and social identity needs to further promote addictive consumption behavior [2].

The characteristics of male addiction are mostly manifested as collectors or expert roles, paying attention to the brand significance and self-identity of goods, such as persistently collecting fashion clothing, books, tools, etc., and will also be maintained and displayed after purchase. Women's addiction is mostly related to emotional regulation. Men emphasize the symbolic value and self-definition of the goods themselves, and their consumption behavior is more targeted [3].

Based on the above content, this study believes that addictive consumption will make consumers unconsciously generate expenses beyond their own economic capacity, that is, consumption out of control. In addition, the study found that users are highly dependent on mobile phones, manifested as impulsive use, tension, control failure and withdrawal symptoms. Alcohol, special events, depression, etc., will aggravate the excessive use of mobile phones, which will lead to negative consequences such as financial problems, interpersonal damage, psychological stress, health risks, etc., which are related to virtual. Some of the negative consequences of addictive consumption of commodities are similar [4].

3.2 Social and Platform-Level Consequences

3.2.1 Structural imbalance and increase in public costs caused by the rising proportion of virtual commodity consumption

From the perspective of group structure, addictive consumption may lead to a continuous rise in the proportion of virtual consumption and an imbalance in the consumption structure. The low marginal cost characteristics of virtual commodity consumption make it prone to irrational hoarding, such as the purchase of unused game props in large quantities, resulting in excessive tilting of social resources to the virtual field and a decline in the proportion of physical consumption. Causing an imbalance in the overall consumption structure [5]. At the same time, the individual financial crisis caused by virtual commod-

ity addiction, such as teenagers stealing parents' accounts to recharge, may increase the cost of social public services such as family conflicts and legal assistance, similar to the implicit cost of social-addictive consumption, which indirectly increases the social burden [6].

3.2.2 Consequences of the platform mechanism

The platform activates an individual's emotional regulation needs and social identity through mechanism design, such as blind box lottery probability setting and game task ladder reward. It will continue to strengthen consumers' dependence on virtual goods and form a cycle of consumption-feedback-re-consumption. This mechanism also has positive consequences, that is, the platform can allow consumers to buy more of their own goods through these designs, forming a consumption dependence [1].

3.3 Consequences at the Government Level

With the rapid development of science and technology, the existing laws, regulations, and regulatory mechanisms are lagging in dealing with addictive consumption, such as shortcomings in the protection of minors. In virtual commodity supervision cases such as game recharge restrictions and live broadcast reward control, the study mentioned that the government can guide consumers to consume rationally through price regulation such as taxation, information intervention such as health publicity, to balance consumption freedom and public health protection, and provide a theoretical basis and health guarantee for the formulation of relevant public policies. However, in practice, it may face difficulties in intervention [5].

4. The Motives of Addictive Consumption

4.1 Individual Causes

4.1.1 Lack of self-regulation ability

Lack of self-regulation is one of the core theories that many studies pay attention to. In the theory of self-control, it is pointed out that when an individual's self-control resources are limited, they encounter pressure, fatigue or emotional fluctuations, and the self-control system is more likely to collapse, which may lead to addictive consumption behavior [7].

4.1.2 Motivation for emotional regulation

The study points out that when individuals face and experience negative emotions, they are more likely to achieve emotional avoidance and escape through shop-

ping behavior, and then fall into a bad cycle of consumption-pleasure-re-consumption. This emotional regulation motivation has become an important individual motive for addictive consumption [8].

4.1.3 Dopamine reward mechanism

The dopamine reward mechanism and immediate demand satisfaction play an important role in addictive consumption. Related neuroscientific research has found that the dopamine-driven reward system, reinforcement theory, cognitive bias and social identity needs have jointly promoted the emergence and maintenance of addictive consumption behavior [2].

4.1.4 Dependence on behavioral characteristics

Although the research on mobile phone dependence focuses on the use of devices, the impulsive use, control failure, withdrawal anxiety and other characteristics found are highly similar to the behavioral characteristics of addictive consumption of virtual goods, both of which are manifested as uncontrollable repetitive behavior and continuous investment under negative consequences. This provides evidence for understanding the behavioral dependence in the consumption of virtual goods. Individuals' high-frequency consumption of virtual goods may gradually evolve into a similar dependence pattern, becoming one of the characteristics of addictive consumption [4].

4.2 Pre-causes of Groups and Platforms

4.2.1 Group level: strengthening social attributes

At the social level, the strengthening of social attributes of virtual consumption is an important reason for addictive consumption. The study found that with the popularization of social platforms, the frequency of use of virtual goods such as virtual gifts and game skins in social interaction has increased significantly. Its non-physical and instant exchange characteristics have lowered the psychological threshold of consumption. Individuals are more likely to continue to invest due to social needs and then develop into addictive consumption [6].

4.2.2 Platform level: mechanism design induction

The psychological control design of the platform is very important, which will amplify the individual's addictive tendency. The core is to activate the individual's emotional regulation needs and social identity through mechanism design, so as to strengthen consumption dependence. For example, the study found that the gambler effect and community transmission of blind box virtual goods such as digital collections, will strengthen addictive consumption through social feedback, which confirms the role of the

platform induction mechanism [9].

4.3 The Previous Cause of the Government

With the rapid development of science and technology, the existing laws, regulations and regulatory mechanisms are lagging in dealing with addictive consumption. For example, there are shortcomings in the protection of minors, and it is difficult to effectively curb the spread of addictive consumption, which provides environmental conditions for the emergence of addictive consumption to a certain extent.

5. Conclusion

This article analyzes the economic consequences and psychological motives of addictive consumption behavior of virtual goods by sorting out relevant literature at home and abroad. Research shows that in terms of economic consequences, addictive consumption of virtual commodities not only affects individual financial health and rational consumption, but also may cause problems such as imbalance in consumption structure, mismatch of social resources, and disputes over platform responsibility. At the same time, the government is facing a lag in supervision, especially in the fields of youth protection, platform standardization, etc., and the existing policy tools are insufficient.

In terms of psychological motives, addictive consumption behavior is mainly affected by individual factors such as lack of self-regulation ability, immediate satisfaction tendency, emotional regulation motivation and differences in personality traits; at the socio-psychological level, social comparison mechanism, platform control design and other factors amplify individual consumption impulses and strengthen addictive behavior. This study believes that future research should further expand the scope of research samples, combine a variety of methods such as behavioral experiments, promote the integration of psychology and economic theory, deeply study the impact of platform design mechanism on consumption behavior, put forward targeted intervention policies and regulatory suggestions, and promote rational consumption, reduce the social burden of addictive consumption of virtual commodities, and promote economic health and sustainable development.

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